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CSD *News Release*

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4-H Kids Learn About Plants the “Hands-on” Way

Not all kids have gone away to camp to have fun this summer. A backyard plant camp last week provided lots of local fun for 22 youngsters from 4-H clubs across Miami-Dade County.

Kathie Roberts, an Extension Agent with Miami-Dade County's Consumer Services Department, developed the three-day program to pass her love and enthusiasm for plants on to 4-H members.

The idea began when Carol Douglass, the Exhibits Director at the Miami-Dade County Fair, told Kathie that the Fair had had no plant entries from individuals – only schools. A former 4-H member herself, Kathie says her favorite 4-H memory was making exhibits for the County Fair. “Fair entries provide lessons in creativity, responsibility, and pride in showmanship,” she says, “plus there is always the monetary reward.”

The camp provided a range of activities built around plants and craft items to be used as exhibits at the County Fair next March. There was a garden wind mobile made from a two-liter bottle, a recycling project which involved making flower vases from juice bottles, creating authentic looking plants from paper, and designing artwork from dried leaves.

Other Miami-Dade County extension staff provided research-based education in their areas of expertise. Family and Consumer Science Agent Jacquelyn Gibson explained the nutritional value of plant foods in the diet. As a follow-up, the 4-H members prepared a meal with a salad of 14 vegetables, three salad dressings (the Ranch was made from soy milk and tofu), tacos made from a soy/meat substitute, and a favorite – strawberry/banana smoothies with soy milk.

“The kids loved the meal and were introduced to new foods they might never have tried,” Roberts said. “They also learned that soy-based products are equal in nutrient value like calcium, but do not have the unhealthy fat and high calories of whole milk products.”

Tropical Fruit Extension Agent Dr. Carlos Balerdi provided lessons in plant reproduction, including air layer and grafting. Each 4-H'er planted cuttings and took home four plants to be raised for the next County Fair.

The 4-H members also visited the Herbonics Nursery in Homestead where the Manager, Valdo Guerrero explained the ‘hydroponics’ method of raising plants in a nutrient solution. They also observed how the herbs were cut, packaged and labeled for grocery stores. Each participant was given two herbs to take home. Many used the herbs in dishes they brought to the next day’s camp.

The University of Florida’s Tropical Research Center facilitated a tour, conducted an educational program on “Bugs - the good-bad and ugly” and on viruses in plants, as well as provided career information for the future horticulturalists in the group.

Several commercial entities including Publix, Costco, Home Depot and Harold B. Martin, Inc. provided donations which helped to make this program such a success, Roberts said. “It’s very encouraging to see businesses support our 4-H youth by providing these hands on life learning experiences,” she added

Persons wishing to start a 4-H club should contact any of the following 4-H regional offices:

South (305) 248-3311 ext. 239

Central (305) 592-8044

North (305) 681-4938.

FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION CONTACT:

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The Miami Dade Consumer Services Department is an agency of Miami-Dade County government that protects consumers through complaint mediation, business regulation, and consumer education. The Department operates the Consumer Hotline (305) 375-3677, a central telephone number for consumer complaints and information.